

## Young Canadians' Family Formation: Variations in Delayed Start and Complex Pathways

Zenaida R. Ravanera, Rajulton Fernando, and Thomas K. Burch

In our previous studies we have shown that in comparison to older cohorts, young Canadians delay their transition to adulthood and follow more complex life course trajectories. The “typical” life course is experienced only by one-fourth to one-third of a cohort with the younger cohorts more unlikely to do so (Ravanera, Rajulton, and Burch, 1994). Younger cohorts go through events such as home-leaving, school completion, start of regular work, and first unions through cohabitation or marriage at later ages and they trace pathways through these events that markedly differ from those of the older cohorts (Ravanera, Rajulton, and Burch, 1998; Ravanera et al, 2002). However, within cohorts, there are variations in the general trends in timing and trajectories to adulthood. For example, an examination of the effects of family changes (such as divorce and mother's labour force participation) on the early life transitions of children reveals that those whose mothers worked full-time made transition to adulthood at later ages, while family disruption led to earlier school completion, work start and home-leaving (Ravanera, Rajulton, and Burch, 2003).

This paper, while focussing mainly on family formation, expands on our previous studies using a life course perspective. This viewpoint assumes that “(L)ife outcomes are the result of an interactive process that occurs when the individual encounters particular expectations, opportunities, or barriers in the current social context” (Giele, 2002: 71). *Timing* of life events is an outcome of adaptation for achieving individual or collective goals and is affected by *location in time and place* (culture and society), *linked lives* (social relations in institutions and communities), and *human agency* (including influence on individuals of work, school, and family) (Giele and Elder, 1998; Giele, 2002).

Furthermore, this perspective assumes that there is dynamic interplay of social condition or change with cultural construction and individual life course. Social changes, such as those brought about by globalization, occurring at the macro (or societal), meso (or community), and micro (or family and individual) levels have impact on the life course and on its social and cultural construction (Buchmann, 1989). In turn, changes in individual biographies bring about social change through alteration of cultural construction of the life course (Riley, Kahn, and Foner, 1994). Altered patterns of behaviour are transmitted between generations through socialization, and as “a process of lateral diffusion between age peers, whereby innovations adopted ... are transmitted to others and accepted, modified, or rejected” (Hammel, 1990: 459).

Making use of this life course perspective, we analyze the timing and pathways towards family formation of Canadians born in 1966-85. Particular focus is placed on the influences of social class, cultural orientation, and opportunity structures. This is done using retrospective data collected through the 1995 and 2001 General Social Surveys on Family History merged with characteristics of aggregates (for example, communities and larger geographic areas such as Census Metropolitan Areas) derived from the 1996 and 2001 censuses respectively. The merged data allow exploring the interrelationships

between macro-level structural characteristics and individual experience of family formation

The 1995 and 2001 General Social Surveys conducted by Statistics Canada covered a representative sample of 10750 and 24310 respondents respectively from all of Canada except the Yukon and Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and full time residents of institutions. Although the survey respondents are those aged 15 and over as of the survey dates, this study centers on those born from 1966 to 1985; that is, those aged 15-29 in 1995 and 16-35 in 2001. Information gathered by the surveys includes various aspects of the family including parents, children, union histories through both common-law and marriage, fertility, and socioeconomic variables. The survey also collected education and work histories. In this study, we use of the retrospective information on age at experience of events at early life, in particular, the ages at home-leaving, start of regular work, completion of schooling, entry into cohabitation and marriage, and onset of parenthood.

Both the 1996 and 2001 censuses have gathered extensive information on individuals, which when aggregated provides data on various geographic levels from small aggregations such as dissemination areas (that could represent communities wherein the respondents reside) and larger ones such as Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) and Census Divisions. Some of the variables derived from the censuses are: type and size of area in which the community is located, percent unemployed, percent immigrant, percent separated or divorced, percent with tertiary education, percent with low income, percent visible minority, and several others. A number of these variables are used as indicators of opportunities or lack thereof in the communities, community social capital, and community's cultural characteristics.

Techniques of event history analysis, mainly, (a) life tables, (b) hazards models, (c) non-Markov state-space approach to trajectory analysis and, whenever the number of samples within aggregation is large enough, (d) multi-level techniques of analysis. Five-year birth cohorts (1966-70, 1971-75, 1976-80, and 1981-85) are used for the various types of analysis. However, for the trajectory analysis that requires large number of cases, we make use of 10-year birth cohorts (1966-75 and 1976-85).

#### **Reference:**

Buchmann, M. 1989. *The Script of Life in Modern Society: Entry into Adulthood in a Changing World*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Giele, J. 2002. Life Careers and the Theory of Action. In R.A. Settersten, Jr. and T.J. Owens (eds) *New Frontiers in Socialization*. Oxford: Elsevier Science. Pp. 65-88.

Giele, J. and G. Elder. 1998. Life Course Research: Development of a Field. In J. Giele and G. Elder (eds) *Methods of Life Course Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. Pp. 5-27.

Hammel, E. A. 1990. A Theory of Culture for Demography. *Population and Development Review* 16(3): 455-486.

Ravanera, Z.R., F.Rajulton and T.K.Burch, 1994. Tracing the life courses of Canadians. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 21: 21-34.

Ravanera,Z.R., F.Rajulton and T.K.Burch, 1998. Early life transitions of Canadian women: A cohort analysis of timing, sequences, and variations. *European Journal of Population*. 14:179-204.

Ravanera, Z.R., F. Rajulton, T.K. Burch and C. Le Bourdais. 2002. The Early Life Courses of Canadian Men: Analysis of Timing and Sequences of Events. *Canadian Studies in Population*. 29: 293-312.

Ravanera, Z.R., F. Rajulton, and T.K. Burch. 2003. Early Life Transitions of Canadian Youth: Effects of Family Transformation and Community Characteristics. *Canadian Studies in Population*.

Riley, M. W., R. L. Kahn, and A. Foner. 1994. Introduction: The Mismatch between People and Structures. In M.W. Riley, R. L. Kahn and A. Foner (eds) *Age and Structural Lag*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. Pp. 1-12.